

Oral Questions

STATEMENTS MADE BY MINISTER AND BY SCIENTIST

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, the halo is not shining for those families who have relatives in hospitals hovering on the verge of death.

Some Hon. Members: Shame!

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Health and Welfare claims he has told the truth to the people. Why is it that today he has finally admitted that tests were done on the Friday, not only in Ottawa but also in New Brunswick, which showed mice were dying? Why has he admitted now that a link was established on Friday, when in fact when he was speaking to the press last week about this issue he said on Sunday: "There was, when we asked the companies to stop shipment there was a suspicion that there could be a link. Then we have to feed that material to laboratory rats". In fact, the laboratory animals were dying two days prior to the Minister's claim that the laboratory rats testing began.

How does the Minister explain the absolute contradiction between his statement in the House yesterday and the statement of the federal scientist who was responsible for carrying out the tests who said that a link was established on Friday, November 27?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, no matter how loudly people speak I will stay with the facts and here they are again. I have said consistently and I say again today that there was not a link established on the Friday. The Hon. Member keeps using those words. I said, and I will repeat it again, that the testing that was done up until the Friday was for paralytic shellfish poisoning. That was the experience of the Department along with DFO. The mice did not react relative to the symptoms and reactions of PSP.

An Hon. Member: Big deal.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): That is a very big deal because it is important. Additionally, from that Friday, as well as the details I gave yesterday, we stepped up the investigation. The point that I make again is that those are the facts. We stepped up the investigation and the link between a toxin other than PSP was established on the Monday, the Tuesday. That detail I have given as well.

● (1430)

The Member talked about links. It is necessary to understand that the Department did not have the scientific basis at the times that she talks about which it had at the time which I have talked about which enabled me to give the health alert on Tuesday.

[Translation]

EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF ISSUE

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House, the Minister of National Health and Welfare claimed that the injections were given on Monday, November

30 and Tuesday, December 1. From what the scientists said, it seems the first injections were given on the Friday before, and that the mice started dying in Ottawa and also in Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick, that Friday. Why didn't the Minister conclude there was enough scientific evidence to ask the companies to stop shipping mussels as of Sunday morning? He did not have the courage and he didn't even know the facts, because as late as Monday, he was not aware of what was happening. Why was he not sufficiently informed to be able to issue the same warning to Canadians? Up to Tuesday evening, consumers were still eating toxic mussels.

[English]

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I will go through it one more time and maybe most Members in the House will understand. On Friday, as I have already indicated, there was a test done and the mice did not react—

Ms. Copps: You did not indicate that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The questions are detailed and probably call for detailed answers. I ask Hon. Members to refrain from calling out too often unless they are recognized. The Hon. Minister will complete his answer.

Mr. Beatty: She is not even listening to the response.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): As an investigative tool about which I asked my officials again today, on the Sunday we told the wholesaler, the supplier, and the shipper, that we had some indication that there could be problems with their product and to stop the shipment. That is what the Department did.

Ms. Copps: But you did not know about it.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Hon. Member could give me the same courtesy as I am trying to give her, just for once maybe.

What happened was very clear. The Department informed the shippers. As I have said in the House time after time, I was notified on Monday. On Tuesday we had the link and the health alert was issued.

Mr. Nunziata: You are finished, Jake.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, my information, my details, and my facts have been consistent. I do not think they have differed in any way today from the first day I was asked this question.

* * *

TRADE

CANADA-UNITED STATES TRADE AGREEMENT

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for International Trade.